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NAAS Preparation Evaluation Report Phase 1: June - October 2018

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NAAS Preparation Evaluation Report Phase 1

June - October 2018

Introduction

The Social Work Department at the University of Salford agreed to pilot preparation sessions for the first cohorts of social workers and practice supervisors undergoing the National Assessment and Accreditation System process in Phase 1. This work was originally to be 'in kind' for members of the Greater Manchester Social Work Academy (GMSWA). As the content of the assessment process became known to Local Authorities via the Department for Education and Mott MacDonald, the assessment delivery organisation, the University negotiated a price for sessions to contribute to the employment of actors for the simulated practice exercise.

Initial consultation took place with Manchester City Council who were joined by colleagues from Bury, Wigan and Oldham for the preparation and practice assessment days.

The evaluation took place in two parts.

1. July 2018 Participants were asked rated their response to four questions before and after the preparation and practice days. These scales were completed contemporaneously.
2. October 2018 Participants who had completed the NAAS were asked to rate their experience in response to set questions and take part in interviews.

The purpose of the NAAS preparation and practice assessment days is to prepare childcare practitioners (Social Workers and Practice Supervisors) for the NAAS (National Assessment and Accreditation System) assessment. Each practitioner attended a preparation session followed by a half-day practice of each element of the NAAS.

The preparation session consisted of informing practitioners and supervisors about each element of the NAAS process and the relevant Knowledge and Skills Statements. Time was given for attendees to talk about their worries and anxieties about the process and they were informed how the practice sessions would run.

The content of the practice assessment days drew upon the information participating Local Authorities were able to provide and as the NAAS pilot rolled out we adjusted some elements to reflect the experience of Social Workers and Practice Supervisors. For example, the simulated practice exercise for the first group of participants was held in a simulated home environment. On receipt of information that this scenario was held in an office environment (table & chairs) for the NAAS assessment we changed the setting. We have continued to adapt the preparation days over the past six months in response to information and to meet the needs of Local Authorities. As a result, the NAAS preparation day now differs from the one experienced by the respondents to this evaluation.

PREPARATION & PRACTICE

The practice days consisted of the following activities:

Knowledge Test:

18 general and 12 applied social work multiple-choice questions completed under exam conditions (1 hour).

Simulated Practice Assessment:

A simulated role-play was undertaken with a professional actor playing the service-user. Participants were given a case study to read fifteen minutes before the simulation to prepare them for the scenario. Two different scenarios were presented for practitioners, one involving a teenager and one a mother. Practice supervisors undertook a supervision session with a social worker (played by an actor). Simulations were live streamed and observed by individual faculty members (15 minutes).

Reflective Session:

Immediately after the simulation, participants were given the opportunity to reflect on their role-play with the faculty member who had observed the simulation. Participants were given the opportunity to reflect on what they did well and what they might have done differently. They were also asked to consider the social work theories and approaches they had applied during the simulation (15 minutes).

Written Exercise:

Participants were asked to write up their role play simulations with an action plan of what needed to happen next. Participants were also given further written information about the scenarios that affected the action plan, and this needed to be incorporated into the written exercise (30 minutes).

Evaluation PART 1 (July 2018)

Participants were asked four specific questions:

- 1) Awareness of the NAAS
- 2) Informed about the NAAS
- 3) Prepared for the NAAS
- 4) Confidence in Undertaking the NAAS

Participants rated their views before and after the session. Scores were between 1 and 6.

Preparation Day

The preparation day involved 28 practitioners and 17 practice supervisors. Total scores out of a possible 270 and average scores out of a possible 6 were as follows:

Question	Before Preparation Day	After Preparation Day	Before Average Score	After Average Score
Awareness of the NAAS	180	236	4	5.24
Informed about the NAAS	157	223	3.48	4.95
Prepared for the NAAS	124	209	2.75	4.64
Confidence in Undertaking the NAAS	137	205	3.04	4.55

The above scores can be broken down further into roles (i.e. practitioner/practice supervisor):

Practitioners

Total scores out of a possible 168 and averages scores out of a possible 6 were as follows:

Question	Before Preparation Day	After Preparation Day	Before Average Score	After Average Score
Awareness of the NAAS	113	153	4.03	5.46
Informed about the NAAS	97	141	3.46	5.03
Prepared for the NAAS	78	128	2.78	4.57
Confidence in Undertaking the NAAS	82	121	2.93	4.32

Practice Supervisors

Total scores out of a possible 102 and average scores out of a possible 6 were as follows:

Question	Before Preparation Day	After Preparation Day	Before Average Score	After Average Score
Awareness of the NAAS	67	89	3.94	5.23
Informed about the NAAS	59	82	3.47	4.82
Prepared for the NAAS	46	81	2.70	4.76
Confidence in Undertaking the NAAS	53	88	3.11	5.18

EVALUATION PART 2 (October 2018)

Methods

Social work practitioners, who undertook the University of Salford NASS Preparation Course and then completed the NAAS assessment, were asked to complete a short evaluation task: to answer two questions using likert scaling (1 being 'not useful' and 6 being 'very useful') ($n = 17$) and to provide qualitative feedback in relation to how well prepared they felt they were ($n = 18$). Participants were asked three questions:

- 1) How useful was the course in preparing you to undertake the NAAS assessment?
- 2) How did the course impact on your confidence and performance?
- 3) How could the course be organised differently or better?

Results

How useful was the course in preparing you to undertake the NAAS assessment?

	1 Not useful	2	3	4	5	6 Very useful
Number of responses			2	1	11	3

It is clear from these responses that most of the participants found the course to be 'useful' ($n = 11$) or 'very useful' ($n = 3$) in preparing them for the NAAS assessment.

How did the course impact on your confidence and performance?

	1 Not useful	2	3	4	5	6 Very useful
Number of responses			3	7	4	3

In terms of the course having an impact on participants' confidence and performance, most participants reported a positive impact in the range of 'fairly useful' ($n = 7$), useful ($n = 4$) or 'very useful' ($n = 3$).

For either question there were no negative responses.

Qualitative findings

Participants were asked to consider the organisation of the course in terms of whether it could be organised differently or better. A wide ranging of themes and ideas were provided by the participants. These are organised into the following themes: alignment of course and NAAS; reflective reality – course vs NAAS; enhancing expectations/reducing anxieties; use of research and theory; practical considerations – format and setting.

Alignment of course and NAAS

Many participants commented on whether the course accurately reflected the NAAS assessment, noting the need for a realignment of the two:

“Feedback that we had to give to the client was informal but on the real one the assessor does not give you any feedback or engage and it felt forced. We weren’t sure if UoS didn’t know about what the day [entailed]”. (P3)

“The day at the University of Salford was very good but it gave a false sense of security as the practice endorsement day was very different and the day did not reflect that. I don’t know if this is because the UoS did not know what the day would entail but it was very different, and it resulted in people being taken aback!” (P2)

“The course was entirely different to the actual NAAS testing day. The simulation and feedback aspect of the NASS test was different from the course at Salford. “(P4)

“[...] I felt the practice stimulation (sic) was excellent. The tutors at Salford were great and really helpful. However, the reality of the NAAS assessment was very different, and the structure and the day did not feel authentic like it did with the practice simulation.” (P10)

In terms of the multiple-choice questions, one participant felt that the course had got this rightly aligned with everyday practice (with content regarding “children and law and things I would practice daily”), whilst the NAAS assessment had not.

One participant framed their opinion in terms of formality and level of comfort:

“I think the course at the uni was easier than the real thing. I think now they know what the course is like it needs to be more formal and the scenarios and the reflection needs to reflect the actual test.” (P8)

The difference between the reflective discussion in the course and that in reality with the NAAS assessor was identified as being very different by several participants. However, one participant rather astutely commented “we know more about the NAAS assessment now, which would inform the Salford University course, So I am sure they will tweak it”.

Reflecting reality: Course versus NAAS

There was a divergence in terms of how participants considered the course content to reflect everyday practice and whether this was achieved to a greater or lesser extent in contrast with the NAAS assessment itself.

“[...] the NAAS real reflection discussion was totally different to that of the scenario given via the UoS course. The real one was much less natural and does not reflect how you would engage in reflective discussions. In future it would be better if the UoS course was more aligned to the real day.” (P1)

“It was useful to practice the observation but the observation in the actual NAAS was much less realistic.” (P7)

Enhancing expectations/reducing anxieties

Of particular benefit, was the course outcome that participants had more informed expectations about the NAAS assessment:

“The course allowed me to have an insight to what was being expected on the day I attended the NASS assessment centre, it gave me the ability to feel less

anxious and have an understanding of what was going to be expected.... “
(P6)

“It helped me to prepare for what to expect on the day of the assessment.
Having a mock test and observed practise reminds you of what to focus on.”
(P12)

“I found the course to be very natural and reduced my anxieties about the NAAS day”. (P13)

Use of research and theory

Two participants mentioned the use of research during the course. Neither felt that this was relevant to the aim of the day:

“When they (UoS) are doing the introductory part of the course they used research – it was too much framed as something too academic in a classroom setting, as opposed to practically applying the research to practice.” (P1)

“[...] align the material more directly with practice re discussion of use of research was not as applicable.” (P5)

Similarly, when using theory during the course, facilitators should be very clear about how this links to practice as this participant observed:

“It (the course) needs the theory to be linked to real life social work practice e.g. posing the questions ‘when you are in this scenario which theories would you use?’” (P1)

Practical considerations: format and setting

Some participants offered feedback relating to the format and setting of the course. One participant commented on the use of a hotel and the artificial feel this created:

“I also feel that it would be much better if the real day could be held at the University as a hotel setting with a desk in the middle of a large room with a camera facing you does not at all reflect how social workers practise. Instead of spending money on the hotel it would be better used securing a University resource.” (P2)

Most participants found the course to be useful as this participant articulates, whilst adding a caveat in terms of being prepared for some of the more practical, organisational detail of the actual assessment itself:

“I felt the preparation work was useful in the format and information it shared. Having completed the assessment centre programme, I was not fully prepared to know my phone was going to be taken away and how formal the actual assessment centre was, this needs to be reflected in the preparation work at Salford.” (P6)

The Knowledge and Skills Statement was alluded to by one participant:

“[...] perhaps there is scope to look at the core Knowledge and Skills in more depth, as this is what the NAAS is based on.” (P12)

One participant offered detailed consideration of the use of actors in the simulation exercise:

“The Actor [...] gave feedback informally at the end of the session, but I wonder if this an opportunity to give more formal feedback? It is a golden opportunity to provide social workers with such feedback as it doesn't happen in any other part of part of social work practice.” (P1)

Conclusions

Overall, the findings presented above suggest that most participants found the course to be useful in that it alleviated anxieties, enhanced expectations and enabled social workers to have a practice at the different elements of the NAAS assessment. Several participants commented on the good standard of organisation and delivery of the course with only minor comments about how the format and setting could be enhanced. The most helpful suggestions in terms of content were centred on the alignment of the course and the reality of the NAAS assessment; in particular the reflective element of the NAAS assessment. Participants clearly identified how the

reflective discussion, which was undertaken in the course simulation, diverged from the reality of the assessment where social workers were asked several fixed reflective questions (there was no dialogue). In addition, a small number of participants suggested that the theory and research references were less than helpful, and what would be more useful would be more attention paid to the core skills and knowledge that are assessed as part of the NAAS. In summary, feedback provided helpful suggestions whilst providing evidence that social workers positively benefit from the opportunity to undertake the course prior to the NAAS assessment.

The design of the NAAS preparation sessions has since been increasingly aligned with the NAAS Assessment. This process has been dependant on feedback from Social Workers and Practice Supervisors. Unfortunately, the DfE and the NAAS Assessment provider have not been able to share information about the 'tweaks' (sic) being made to the process as the Pilot progressed through Stage 1.

As Stage 1 draws to a close it would be timely to repeat this evaluation over the coming months in partnership with the commissioning Local Authorities.

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